

The secret to communicating with Gen Y

By Gaynor Lowndes, Managing Director of The Recruitment Training Company

Recently, I have appeared on TV (jij tv) and national radio as a recruitment expert commenting on Generation Y issues. As a result I have become somewhat of an expert on communicating and motivating Gen Y. This is an issue close to my heart. I not only have Gen Y's working for me but most of the people I train and coach are also Gen Y's, so as a Gen Xer, I needed to take some time to research and understand this generation. This journey led me to train as a workplace performance coach with Results Coaching Systems. As well as this, I have been studying Gestalt therapy and the two strains of very different study led me to develop some tools for communicating with and therefore getting the best from Gen Y's.

Knowledge workers

Gen Y are considered "knowledge workers". That is, they are paid for what they know and how they use this knowledge.

Only 100 years ago people were paid for their physical labour and the dominant management model was the master apprentice model. By the mid 20th century, workers were involved in processes that required less physical exertion and more repetitive tasks such as entering data, filing paper and running machinery. The dominant leadership style was one of managing processes and finding greater efficiencies. By 2005, however, over 40% of workers were considered to be knowledge workers and this percentage is increasing each and every year.

As a result, leaders now need to improve thinking. Gen Y need leaders who will help them shine at work, who help them fulfill their potential rather than the old paradigm of management. Most current leaders have been trained to improve processes, not thinking, which is where the communication problems occur.

More powerful communication

We know that Gen Y's are loyal to themselves, not their employers (like baby boomers) or even their careers (like Gen Xers). So how do we es-

tablish better communication with this generation? Get them to think for themselves!

Gen Y's don't respond to authoritative and dictatorial communication methods which is how the rest of the workforce was brought up. To get the best from Gen Y, you need to challenge them to think for themselves.

Creating mind maps

Basically, as events occur in our life we make sense of them by comparing them against what we already have "hardwired" in our brain. Until this hardwiring is "replaced" by something else, every event that happens will be compared against this piece of hardwiring and most probably reinforce the belief. Our brains like to create order out of the chaos of data coming into them, to make links between information so that our lives make more sense. We feel more comfortable when surrounded by order. Therefore we are constantly making links between new information as it appears and what is already stored (or hardwired) in our brain. Many forms of psychotherapy including Gestalt therapy have made significant inroads into understanding how our brains look at situations and make meaning from them.

Performance coaches believe that when people are not performing at their best it is because they have not yet been able to "think themselves out of the situation". Too many of us focus on the problem and not on the solution when communicating. This keeps us in the problem or drama of a situation. This focus will never improve performance.

Asking the right questions

Rather than asking "why didn't you hit your targets?" you may choose to ask "What do you need to do next time to hit your targets?" This slight change in the way the question was asked will make a huge difference to the response you receive and the performance that will follow after the discussion. The first question keeps you in the problem, the second question moves you toward a solution. Many problem type questions

start with the word "why". As mentioned earlier, Gen Y respond well to coming up with their own thoughts around something rather than being told what to do.

Focus on the positive

Did you know that we receive only a couple of minutes of positive feedback a year as opposed to many hours of negative feedback? Learn the skill of acknowledgement and you will be amazed at the quality of your communication. Not only acknowledge those around you but acknowledge yourself as well.

Listen without an agenda

This is one of the most valuable and recent lessons I have learned. Results Coaching Systems call it "listening for potential". People only listen a small percentage of the time, with the rest of their attention focused on judging, assessing, trying to sound smart, listening to distractions, trying to work other people out, or being self conscious to the extent that they are only listening to themselves.

Gen Y respond very well to those people that "listen for their potential". Having an agenda when communicating clouds our ability to listen for someone's potential.

In summary

So by asking solution-based questions where people have to think their way out of a situation, listening without an agenda and focusing on the positive, you will be well on the way to communicating in a way that Gen Y respond to. ■



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